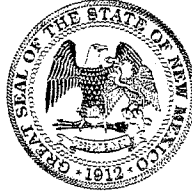


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December 17, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: David Harrell 

RE: WRITTEN REPORT: *SCHOOL PRINCIPAL RECRUITMENT AND MENTORING*, SJM 3

Senate Joint Memorial 3

Endorsed by the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC), Senate Joint Memorial 3 (2008) is a response to needs identified in a joint study of the three-tiered teacher licensure, evaluation, and salary system by the Office of Education Accountability (OEA), the LESC, and the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC). Presented to the LESC during the 2007 interim, this study found, among other points:

- that the effectiveness of school leaders is second only to classroom instruction among the factors that affect student learning;
- that school leaders in New Mexico face a number of challenges – some as a result of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), others related to the diverse student body that characterizes public schools today, and still others related to the growing importance of data-driven decision-making; and
- that the turnover rate of school principals and district superintendents is a cause of concern (one-half of New Mexico schools have had three or more principals in the last 10 years and 35 percent of districts have had three or more superintendents in the last four years).

In response to these findings, SJM 3 requests that OEA, the Public Education Department (PED), and the Higher Education Department (HED), in collaboration with school districts and institutions of higher education, develop a plan to enhance the recruitment, preparation, mentoring, evaluation, professional development, and support for school principals and other school leaders. SJM 3 also asks that these agencies report their findings and recommendations to the LESC by November 1, 2008 and that the plan be reviewed by the LESC before implementation.

Previous Study by the LESC

The report in response to SJM 3 is the latest in a series of studies and hearings that the LESC has had on the issue of school leaders. In some cases, these hearings have led to enacted legislation.

- As early as the 2001 interim, the LESC made the principal as instructional leader one of the committee's focus areas, holding a full-day hearing on the topic. During these presentations, the committee heard from various professionals in the field of educational administration, including university professors, state licensure officials, and practicing principals and superintendents, who collectively provided a multi-faceted view of the state of the principalship in New Mexico and across the country. The major issues at that time were the changing expectations in terms of student learning and instructional leadership, the uses of student performance data, the stressful working conditions, the insufficient compensation, and a looming shortage of qualified candidates.
- These themes continued through the 2002 interim, when the LESC heard additional testimony from national organizations, from model programs in other states, and from the New Mexico State Department of Education, which at the time was considering separate licenses for principals and for superintendents.
- During the 2004 interim, the committee formed the LESC School Principals' Work Group, to study issues of compensation for principals and assistant principals that had arisen, in part, from the adoption of the three-tiered teacher licensure, salary, and evaluation system in 2003. One of the recommendations of this work group was to base the principal's and assistant principal's salary on a "responsibility factor."
- During the 2005 interim, the committee's examination of school leaders took the form of extended testimony from the President of Teachers College, Columbia University, who had recently examined school leader preparation programs across the country. This examination found that the overall quality of educational administration programs in the United States was poor and that the degrees that these programs awarded were inappropriate to the changing needs of today's schools and school leaders. This testimony also proposed that New Mexico, with only approximately 200 graduate students in educational administration programs at any given time, was in a favorable position to institute systemic change and to provide the nation with a successful model for preparing effective school leaders.

- Compensation and evaluation of principals and assistant principals were the focal points of committee hearings on the issue of school leaders during the 2006 interim, leading to LESC-endorsed legislation in 2007 that implemented minimum salaries for principals and assistant principals, calculated by multiplying a school-level responsibility factor by the minimum salary of a Level 3-A teacher, and that required an evaluation component. Also enacted in 2007 were provisions to allow someone with the “highest-ranked counselor license” to qualify for a Level 3-B administrator’s license and to grant, under certain conditions, an alternative Level 3-B license to someone with a graduate degree and at least six years’ experience teaching or administering at the postsecondary level.
- Finally, during the 2007 interim, in addition to the review of the three-tiered system noted above, the LESC received a written report on SJM 15 (2007), *School Administrator Licensure Pathways*. This report recommended that, as an alternative to the standard administrative license, PED promulgate rules to establish a provisional school administrator license that would be renewable for no more than four years, during which time the candidate completes all of the current requirements for a Level 3-B license, which the report considered the “gold standard” for administrative licensure.

Report on SJM 3

Supported by a grant from the Wallace Foundation, OEA has taken the lead in the study requested by SJM 3, assembling a wide range of interested parties for a series of meetings throughout the interim, researching the various aspects of the issues, and securing presentations by recognized experts and practitioners in school leadership. The accompanying report begins with an introduction that describes the interim work in response to the memorial, followed by a brief background that presents some facts and factors about student achievement and school leadership in New Mexico. The central premise of the report might be found in this assertion: “strong principal leadership programs have shifted the emphasis from traditional administrative and managerial roles to a focus on the school principal’s influence on school effectiveness and student learning.”

The main body of the report consists of explanations of and rationale for six recommendations “for strengthening New Mexico’s capacity to attract and retain strong school leaders.” The report concludes with a list of the more than 150 people who attended one or more of the six statewide meetings that OEA hosted during the interim, a list of the support staff for the project, and a copy of SJM 3 itself.

The recommendations cover a range of activities intended to implement the requests of the memorial. While details appear in the report itself, a list of the recommendations may be helpful here:

1. Revitalize school principal standards: by devoting particular attention to alignment between the PED rule on administrative licensure and the recently adopted framework for the evaluation of principals and assistant principals; and by implementing a revised, standards-based process through which PED approves all educational leadership preparation programs in New Mexico.

2. Strengthen recruitment, incentives, and retention: by identifying potential school leaders; by considering financial incentives like a loan-for-service program; and by improving the working conditions through such activities as mentoring, internships, and defining school success in terms broader than just the adequate yearly progress of NCLB.
3. Develop and implement the New Mexico Leadership Institute: by supporting a collaborative framework for strengthening the preparation, mentoring, and professional development of school leaders through several specific programs, including a licensure program for aspiring principals, mentoring for new principals, intensive support for principals in schools in need of improvement, support for aspiring superintendents, and mentoring for new superintendents.
4. Establish data and accountability systems: by developing a database that, among other features, links higher education and public school data to track supply and demand and that captures demographic and academic data on leadership candidates.
5. Refine current certification requirements: by changing the required years of teaching experience to obtain a Level 3-B license and by developing a provisional school administrator license.
6. Refine and revitalize university principal preparation programs: by developing a core educational leadership curriculum for the colleges of education and ensuring transferability of this core curriculum and by having the colleges of education partner in the development of the New Mexico Leadership Institute.

These recommendations address a number of the issues that have been brought to the committee's attention since the 2001 interim, in particular: the changing expectations of principals and other school leaders, the uses of data, working conditions, supply and demand of school leaders, the content and quality of leadership preparation programs, and alternative routes to administrative licensure.

Background: The Context of School Leadership Today

As its final topic, this cover memo provides a brief review of some of the issues and activities in school leadership across the country – involving superintendents as well as principals – which may help underscore the significance of school leadership in New Mexico.

A familiar proverb offers this wish: “May you live in interesting times.” Although both its origin and implication are subject to debate – whether it comes from an ancient Chinese philosopher or a 20th Century British historian, and whether it is a blessing or a curse – the proverb describes the current state of school leadership in the United States: interesting times. In addition to the requirements of NCLB, the condition of the economy, and certain unique, highly publicized situations – Washington, DC and New Orleans, Louisiana come to mind – there are a number of educational trends and innovations that either pose new challenges for school leaders today or offer means of addressing these challenges.

- One example is the school-wide approach to instruction known as Response to Intervention (RtI) – strongly encouraged by the reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA) and the regulations to implement it; and mandated in New Mexico by PED rule for grades K-3.
 - Nationwide, RtI has presented a variety of challenges for school leaders in terms of school organization, personnel, professional development, instructional material, data collection, and funding.
 - In New Mexico, many of the superintendents who testified during LESC hearings about the proposed funding formula said that they would use additional funding for such actions as purchasing more supplemental intervention materials, hiring intervention specialists, and providing more professional development. They also predicted a decrease in the number of special education referrals (with a corresponding decrease in funding) and noted the costs to implement the RtI model prescribed by PED rule. Moreover, the responses to a PED survey of school districts and charter schools described a significant fiscal impact of RtI, in costs of personnel, instructional resources, and supplies.
- Charter schools are another example, as a number of researchers have begun suggesting that this environment poses unique challenges for school leaders, especially in terms of preparing charter applications, finding and maintaining school facilities, handling finances, hiring personnel, and negotiating with boards, parents, and charter school authorizers – what one source calls “an uncommon set of competencies.” Researchers also anticipate shortages of charter school leaders. According to a November 2008 report by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, “Depending on the rate of growth and the pace of school leader retirements, the charter movement will likely need between 6,000 and 21,000 new leaders in the next 10 years.”
 - A recent special report by *Education Week*, funded by the Wallace Foundation, notes that, in response to these needs, preparation programs for charter school leaders are emerging across the country. For example, the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence trains charter school teachers for secondary leadership positions, like dean or assistant principal, with the expectation that they will become school leaders later; and Central Michigan University recently launched an online master’s degree program in educational leadership with an emphasis on charter schools.
 - In addition, Minnesota, the first state to pass legislation allowing charter schools, recently opened the Minnesota Leadership Academy for Charter and Alternative Public Schools; and Nova Southeastern University, in North Miami Beach, offers masters and doctoral programs in charter school leadership, programs that can lead to school administrator certification by the Florida Department of Education.
- Another challenge facing school leaders – more long-standing than RtI or charter schools – is the high rate of turnover among principals and superintendents, a situation that can make gains in student achievement and effective educational initiatives difficult to maintain.

- As noted above, the 2007 report on the three-tiered system highlighted this issue. The committee has seen it again more recently in testimony by school superintendents on the proposed funding formula, as many of these superintendents stated that they were in their first year in that position.
- The report on SJM 3 addresses the issue of turnover through certain programs within the proposed New Mexico Leadership Institute.
- Another approach being taken in several places is deliberate succession planning – that is, developing a well-defined process for a smooth transition from one school leader to another.
 - On a broad scale, the American Association of School Administrators believes that superintendents have a responsibility to attend to their districts' best interest by planning for their successors, adding, "succession planning should be built into a school district's processes and culture." In addition, a recent study of school leadership in both the United States and Great Britain found that succession planning has "never been more important."
 - More specifically, one of the strategies employed at the Minnesota Leadership Academy for Charter and Alternative Public Schools is to ensure that principals and superintendents see the development of their replacements as a "critical responsibility." This academy also stresses the importance of building a management team that can assume school leadership in the event of an emergency. And the Maryland State Department of Education recently published an extensive guide to leadership succession planning in that state.
 - In New Mexico, however, according a study of the state's school superintendents and school board members published by the Synergy Group, Ltd. in spring 2008, succession planning "is not common." The study found that 82 percent of superintendents reported that their districts had no such plan; and that the plans described by some school board members "suggest that there is no clear understanding of the concept of succession planning."
- Before leaving this point, it might be noted that the effects of turnover among superintendents in New Mexico may be mitigated somewhat by their prior experience.
 - According to the New Mexico Coalition of School Administrators, at least 15 of the current 89 superintendents have been superintendents before in other New Mexico districts; and several others have returned to the same district after retiring as superintendent.
 - In addition, the Synergy Group study found that 42 percent of superintendents had held prior "superintendency" roles (assistant, deputy, or interim); 63 percent had served as district directors or coordinators of special programs; and nearly all had served as school principals.

- One broad-based effort to address school leadership challenges in general is the continuing interest in and recent revisions to national standards for principals and other school leaders.
 - For example, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, in conjunction with the Council of Chief State School Officers, recently revised its standards for school leaders, which had been originally adopted in the mid 1990s. Retaining the focus on instruction and student achievement, these revised standards highlight particular “functions” that school leaders can perform to apply the standards.
 - In April 2008, the National Association of Elementary School Principals issued an update of its standards, first released in 2001. Among other points, this document stresses that principals “must be the lead learners in their schools.” Principals are also advised “to keep a simple concept in mind: Everything a principal does in school should be focused on ensuring the learning of both students and adults.”
- Finally, while much of the attention and effort on behalf of school leadership seem focused on quantifiable matters, practitioners and mentors alike often comment on the value of what might be called the personal aspects of an effective school leader, characteristics that help school leaders prevail in the face of challenges and that help them provide a full educational experience for their students. As a school principal from St. Louis, Missouri says: “As principals, we can’t let students become defined by their percentiles.”
 - The 2008 Principal of the Year, selected by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and MetLife, cites passion and “a can-do attitude,” as well as the wisdom to ask the right questions before reviewing any data.
 - Another principal, writing in *Education Week*, has found that, after 10 years as a school leader, providing emotional support for the “life issues” among the adults in the school remains one of the most challenging parts of the job, yet the part for which there was the least preparation.
 - Among the points of advice to a new principal published in a recent issue of *Teacher Magazine*: be accessible and visible; clearly communicate expectations; listen to the teachers and other staff, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses; and involve teachers, staff, and parents in any major changes.
 - And a final word of advice comes from a column called “The Principal Connection” in a recent issue of the journal *Educational Leadership*: Principals must resist the temptation to focus only on measurable skills, whether in students or teachers, and must foster, by example, “such components of success as caring, tenacity, integrity, and creativity.”